

Parents' Association Newsletter

THOMAS AQUINAS COLLEGE

Fall 2022

An Open Letter to My Parents

What I Needed — Not What I Thought I Wanted

By Paul Dinan (NE'23)

Dear Mom and Dad,

Spending two weeks back on campus this summer, welcoming students to TAC-New England for the High School Summer Program, has brought my thoughts back to my own decision to come to this new campus three years ago. What if I had made a different choice? Where would I be without the priceless formation I have received?

My education here at Thomas Aquinas College would look very different if it weren't for your constant support, guidance, and love. Although I can point to many teachers, coaches, and mentors who have offered me their guidance over the years, my formation has largely been the work of your hands.

I am writing to express my gratitude for all you have given me.

You were the first to foster a sense of wonder in my soul and answer the countless questions I would ask as a young boy about the creation that surrounds us. It was your firm and loving guidance that helped me navigate the murky waters of adolescence, always giving me what I needed and not what I thought I wanted. It was you who urged me, day in and day out, to finish a trying math assignment, to refine a paper that needed just a little more time, to sit at the piano for a half hour before dinner and practice, or to go to the courts and run my serve between tennis lessons.

Our family life has truly helped me to start contemplating the mysteries of the holiest of families in Nazareth, where our Blessed Mother and St. Joseph contemplated the Creator of the marvelous order that we strive to understand. Most importantly, it is your example that has shown me that Our Lord is Wisdom itself, and that He alone is the ultimate end of any education.

In the most beautiful ways, Thomas Aquinas College has continued to foster and develop the formation that you have given me. The wonderful conversations, both in and out of the classroom, with tutors and with peers, remind me of talking for hours around our dinner table. The same determination that you instilled in me has brought me through many demanding Newtonian propositions and dense passages from Aristotle's *Physics* or St. Thomas's *Summa Theologiae*.

Dad, your life has been a great witness to the importance of embracing and carrying on the Western intellectual tradition. The great love you instilled in me for these ancient authors has provided an indispensable undergirding for studying many of the foundational works that we make our way through at the College. You have taught me what it looks like to be a true and ardent lover of Wisdom and to pursue it wholeheartedly.

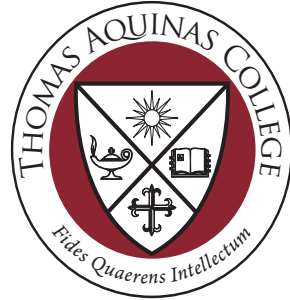
Mom, your example and our frequent conversations have proved invaluable for my understanding the true nature of education, as opposed to the many false alternatives which our culture proposes today. You have always pushed me to educate myself in every area. With your guidance, I can see more clearly the balance which is so hard to attain in all the different spheres of life but which is so necessary for human growth.

Without both of you together, my experience at Thomas Aquinas College would not be nearly what it is, and for this I want to express my deepest gratitude. For the rest of my life, I am confident that I will ceaselessly draw strength from my time on the majestic hills of the Connecticut River Valley, where I am in thrilling pursuit of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness itself.



“Thomas Aquinas College has continued to foster and develop the formation that you have given me.”

Love,
Paul

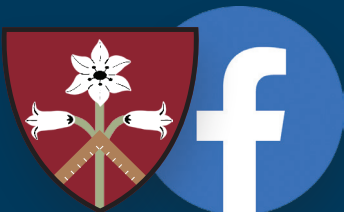


West Coast Alumni & Parent Day 2022

*See the campus! Discuss Great Books!
Connect with friends old & new!*

California Campus
October 8

Open to all TAC Parents, past and present.
For More information, see **tac.events**



Want to connect with other TAC parents?

Join the TAC Parents' Association Facebook Community!

Photos, updates, discussions & more!

Facebook.com/TACParents

Santine Family Singers

Siblings Share Stage in Pirates of Penzance



Throughout their first three years as TAC parents, Mary and Robert Santine of Macomb, Michigan, were never able to make it to the California campus to visit their children. That all changed in April, though, when the College Choir performed Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Pirates of Penzance* for the spring musical. Leading the cast were three Santine siblings spanning four class years — Robert ('22), Anna ('22), and Anthony ('25) — and their parents made absolute sure to be in St. Cecilia Hall on the night of the performance.

"It was really an absolute joy to watch Anna, Robert, and Anthony onstage," recalls Mrs. Santine, who, along with her husband, made the trip westward, one month before they would make it again for Anna and Robby's graduation. "We watched Gilbert and Sullivan as a family when they were growing up, and for sure watched *Pirates* the most. At that time, I don't think we could have imagined that our youngest three would have lead roles one day!"

Robert starred as Frederic, the eponymous (and naïve) "slave of duty," as the comic opera's subtitle describes him, opposite his sister Anna as Mabel Stanley — whose soaring solos make hers a role

both enviable and daunting. Meanwhile, Anthony took on the part of the Sergeant, who heads the laughably unfortunate corps of police.

For the Santine children, the performance was a definite milestone. "We all sang in choir together in high school, but this was our first time singing and performing together in any kind of production," says Robert. "It was a cool first!" The audience would never have known it was the siblings' theatrical debut: Robert and Anthony's antics left viewers in stitches, and Anna's delivery of the most demanding arias left them stunned.

"It was an absolute blast to be a part of a musical I already knew and loved," reflects Anna. "It was even more fun because I was able to do it with so many good friends, and in particular both my brothers — I loved getting to spend extra time with them, and they both did a terrific job. I am so, so proud of them!" Adds Anthony, "Performing with my siblings was amazing. The three of us have sung together a lot in the past, so being able to perform together with our friends was a fantastic experience."

Mr. and Mrs. Santine had prime seats in the Fritz B. Burns Auditorium to watch their children shine. "My favorite part was

looking over at my husband during the performance," says Mrs. Santine. "Every time I looked over, I could see he was just beaming."

Many students coming to Thomas Aquinas College bring budding musical talents with them as freshmen, but the opportunities to refine those gifts over the next four years are many and sundry. Mary and Robert have enjoyed watching their children's gifts blossom at the College. "Both Anna and Robby were able to get experience directing choirs," she says. "And Anthony has begun composing. It was wonderful to hear a recording of the student choir Chrysostomos performing one of his pieces at Adoration."

Especially moving for the couple was witnessing the obvious friendship between their children and fellow thespians. "We really enjoyed the whole cast. What makes music all the more fun and meaningful is performing with friends," says Mrs. Santine. "The campus is blessed to have so many talented students. I can't express how impressed we were."



“It was really an absolute joy to watch Anna, Robby, and Anthony onstage”

Campus Life



Matriculation

The New England campus welcomed members of the Class of 2026 at Convocation on August 20.



Opening Lecture

For the new year's first lecture, President Paul J. O'Reilly spoke on the subject, "What the New Atheists Can Teach us about Our Program."



Ice Cream Social

Freshmen break the ice at Orientation 2022.



All-College BBQ

Students, chaplains, tutors and their parents celebrate the completion of the first week's classes.





Mass of the Holy Spirit

The College opened the academic year with a Mass of the Holy Spirit in Our Mother of Perpetual Help Chapel.



Freshman Orientation



Freshman Picnic

New arrivals meet their classmates, fellow students, and tutors before kicking off the new year

The Unified Life

A New Student Support Coordinator for New England: Emily (Barry '11) Sullivan

With a head and a heart formed by Thomas Aquinas College's program of Catholic liberal education — and refined by 11 years of marriage, motherhood, and evangelization — Emily (Barry '11) Sullivan is uniquely well suited for her new part-time position as student support coordinator on the New England campus. "I had a more circuitous route to TAC than most," Mrs. Sullivan laughs, "but that prepared me well."

Before making her way to the California campus as a 23-year-old freshman in 2007, she spent a year at another college, followed by a year and a half of discernment with the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia in Nashville, and then a year as a NET missionary in Ireland. "My time in religious life taught me the importance of balancing prayer, studies, and recreation," she says. "And my time elsewhere showed me that that balance does not often come easily to young people."

As a student, she often took the initiative in helping her peers achieve that balance. "When I came to TAC, I tried to help my classmates nurture their intellectual lives by setting aside time for prayer, fellowship, and recreation," she says. "I planned informal outings, such as weekend trips to museums or concerts at the Hollywood Bowl, but also more

More than a decade later, Mrs. Sullivan is now charged with enriching the TAC experience once more. Her work includes not only creating fruitful social activities, but also preparing students for life after graduation by helping them discern God's will for their futures and putting them in touch with professional guides. "I know many people in various fields throughout the alumni network," she says. "So I can help students find the mentors they need."

It was while a student at the College that Mrs. Sullivan met her husband, Joe ('09), whom she married soon after graduating. She then worked fulltime as a teacher at The Montfort Academy, just outside New York City, but left after nine months to give birth to the first of the couple's three daughters. "After Brigid was born, I continued to do a little part-time work, such as teaching a senior philosophy class on Friday afternoons," she says. That habit of "a little part-time work" has continued ever since.

"In the decade or so since graduating, I have been blessed with various opportunities to serve the Church through studying, writing, and teaching — all skills that were enhanced by my time at the College," Mrs. Sullivan reflects. For three years she worked as a writer and retreat director for Endow — a Catholic apostolate that promotes the authentic theology of womanhood, rooted in the



Emily (Barry '11) Sullivan at her graduation in 2011 and on the New England campus today

teaching of Pope St. John Paul II — and led seminars for the Witherspoon Institute at Princeton University. Along with Mr. Sullivan, she served on the Pastoral Council of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, working closely with then-Archbishop Charles J. Chaput on issues related to religious freedom and catechesis. When their family lived in Washington, D.C., she managed special projects for the Thomistic Institute.

"All these jobs were part-time — we have three girls!" Mrs. Sullivan laughs. "But sometimes God's goodness has even allowed me to do some of those things with a baby on my hip — like give the keynote for the Edith Stein Conference at Notre Dame with my three-month-old beside me!"

The Sullivans live on a farm just one mile west of Northfield, and their home has become a popular spot for community gatherings. "The farm has proven to be a wonderful place to celebrate feast days, share meals, and make music together," she says. "It's been such a great way to get to know the students and deepen our bonds of friendship." And as a native New Yorker, Mrs. Sullivan is grateful for the opportunity to return to her alma mater — only now on the East Coast.

“My time in religious life taught me the importance of balancing prayer, studies, and recreation. And my time elsewhere showed me that that balance does not often come easily to young people.”

formal events, such as women's retreats and vocation visits." By taking time to re-energize and re-focus, her fellow students were better able to make the most of their studies.

Welcoming Strangers to *The Crowded Table*

A TAC Mom's Paean to "Mothers of Many"

Angela (Andersen '87) Connelly — alumna, Board of Governors member, pro-life activist, mother of nine, and a TAC mom — has added "author" to her long list of titles. Her recent book, *The Crowded Table*, is a timely paean to "the brave and beautiful choice to mother many."

Contempt for large families is increasingly common worldwide, but Mrs. Connelly is inclined to interpret that disregard in a charitable light. "So many in our culture have no experience with large families," she explains. It was during her time as a student at the College, where many students come from large families, that she had her most direct encounter with the phenomenon. "I was immersed in the beauty of big family life! I fell in love with this call, and I want the wider world to get a glimpse of this very real beauty and joy that is often unseen and misunderstood!"

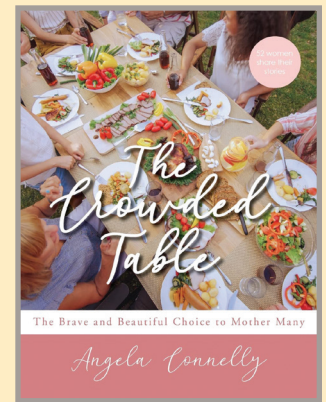
And so she did. "In addition to my own musings throughout the book," Mrs. Connelly says, "52 'mothers of many' also contributed essays." Contributors include Irene Grimm, who with her husband, William, entrusted no fewer than 14 of her children to the College's formation. Many College alumnae also contributed essays, including Mrs. Connelly's eldest daughter, Catherine (Connelly '11) O'Brien, as well as Wendy-Irene (Grimm '99) Zepeda, Molly (White '87) Smillie, and Karen (Stuart '88) Kelly. The result is a tapestry as rich and varied as any large family.

Mrs. Connelly hopes the book will be of service to the mission of big families in the wider culture. "The proceeds from the book will be donated to some of the nonprofits which these women have founded, supporting vulnerable mothers and babies, as well as to Thomas Aquinas College," she says. "It's time to show the world this hidden treasure."



Angela (Andersen '87) Connelly

“I was immersed in the beauty of big family life!”



An Afternoon with Ambassador Eduard

When Dad Checks in from the Holy See



Amb. Eduard Habsburg-Lothringen

While on an April visit to the United States, Amb. Eduard Habsburg-Lothringen, the Hungarian ambassador to the Holy See — and a TAC dad — paid a special visit to Thomas Aquinas College, New England. Joining students for lunch in Gould Commons, he then invited them to Dolben Auditorium, where he recounted his journey to becoming an ambassador and his day-to-day tasks in that role.

Ambassador Eduard — the great-great-great grandson of the late Austro-Hungarian emperor Franz Joseph I — had an unexpected and unusual path to diplomacy. After receiving a doctorate in philosophy from the Katholische Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt in 1999, he wrote multiple screenplays and a few books, most notably *James Bond in 60 Minuten*. He later served as the public relations officer for the Most Rev. Klaus Küng, Bishop of Sankt Pölten, from 2009 to 2014, until his unexpected appointment to the Holy See in 2015. "I became a diplomat like Pontius Pilate got into the Creed," joked Ambassador Eduard. "It was very unlikely that I would become a diplomat."

The Ambassador also reflected on how his general education, like the one offered at Thomas Aquinas College, aids him in his diplomatic duties. "I now go to a job that explains to me why I had nine years of Latin in school, why I wrote a thesis on Thomas Aquinas — which, two jobs back, didn't really make sense," he said. "Suddenly, it all comes together. Whatever you invest in formation, as broad as it is, God has a plan for you."



Parent's Corner

Not Safe, but Good

By **Denise Trull ('80)**

It's the *Iliad* that always brings me back. That first, iconic sentence. "Sing, Muse, of the Wrath of Achilles". That sentence, and the back porch off my kitchen all dappled in the dipping, evening sun of a deep, Midwestern summer. When I look out the squeaky screen door and find one more son's head deep in its opened pages, I know the fall is coming and he is preparing to embark on the first year of his great and glorious adventure.

God never let me forget something Ronald McArthur said one afternoon — well, not quite said, but bellowed for the whole cafeteria to hear. A parent had mentioned that he was sending his child to Thomas Aquinas College to keep him safe from the world. Dr. McArthur rose up to all of his imposing, six-foot-three frame and declared with frightening conviction: "SAFE? Your child will never be safe again once he comes here. He will know things now and will be responsible for knowing things. And he will be called to bring that knowledge into the world. Safe? He will never be safe again!" An honest assessment of things in his bracing, pithy, Dr. McArthur way. And he was correct. It is rather like the wisdom shared by the ever-charming Mr. and Mrs. Beaver of Narnian fame, who minced no words when asked by Lucy if Aslan was "quite safe" and replied, "Safe? Of course he's not safe. But He's good!" He's good.

I have four sons who were educated at Thomas Aquinas College. Four sons who couldn't be more different in temperament. They are in every sense my heroes. What I was not able to do, they did. They have taken their time at Thomas Aquinas College and managed to find a way to bring it to the world in an attractive manner. They are unafraid of 'different' people. They engage everyone and enjoy it.

One son, who did long haul trucking for a year, had an impromptu yet bracing talk with a fellow trucker covered in tattoos about existentialism and Platonism and listened to him with an open interest. He called me and related this story with a kind of heady exuberance that it was my privilege to hear. Another son found himself the guest of a group of Buddhists, who graciously let him stay among them in the hills of Northern



Denise Trull ('81) with sons Benjamin ('19), David ('13), Reuben ('24), and Thomas ('15) and grandson Adam

“They have learned to hone their skills of argument and discovery learned at the college.”

California through the long Covid year doing manual labor. He listened attentively to their thoughts and was able to share his own in a courteous give and take. He found their company blessedly simple, generous, kind, and gracious. He discovered that, in many ways, their thoughts raised profound questions. They thought the same of him. Who knows what seeds he left them with and what they think now? Because he was unafraid to engage. A third son has become the unofficial theological advisor for his grandmother, taking her questions day or night. She in turn brings his answers to her Bible Study. He has learned to translate his theological knowledge into the language of the parish ladies without any condescension whatsoever and is tickled pink by his grandmother's ingenuous questions. This son also reads widely and bravely whatever he finds to be thought provoking. He finds wisdom in a Stephen King novel as well as Roger Scruton, Aquinas, or Kierkegaard. My last son is still at the College. He also is unafraid to engage in the opposite view just to see where it will lead. These sons of mine? They are doing it right. They are my heroes.

They have confidence in their TAC education. They have learned to hone their skills of argument and discovery learned at the College and depend wholeheartedly upon them. This confidence has made them unafraid. I thank my TAC sons for that. And Dr. McArthur. Indeed, they are not safe, but God is good. And this is cause for hope.